

Letter from Taizé

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6

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Taizé
YOUNG ADULT
EUROPEAN
MEETING
Milan
28 December
-1 January 98/99

YOUNG ADULT EUROPEAN MEETING IN MILAN

“Milan will be transformed into a city of prayer.”

(Cardinal Martini)

On 28th December at 7 p.m., the moment when the first common prayer of the European Meeting begins, all the bells of Milan and the diocese will ring out as a sign of welcome! This expression of hospitality, of joy, and of praise is a reflection of these last weeks of preparation in all the region of Milan.

Meetings with the groups organizing the welcome in their parishes follow one another: often there are more than 30 meetings each evening, with young people and adults. They are all looking for accommodation in families in the hope that in the end all the participants at the meeting will be offered hospitality by local people. There is a lot of imagination and often enthusiasm to go towards others, to have the courage to live out something like a pilgrimage within the city itself, and to discover people who can bear witness to their commitment in the mornings during the meeting. There is no lack of initiatives, nor of volunteers who carry them out. But almost every time there needs to be something like a little conversion to change one's way of looking, to recognize that all these initiatives are signs of hope to share and to celebrate.

For several months there has been a prayer every day at noon in one of the oldest churches of the city. For many people this prayer has become a source of energy. The preparation groups also organize regular times of prayer in the evenings which are open to everyone. In

a way Cardinal Martini's desire that the meeting should help people rediscover "silent and prolonged prayer" is already being fulfilled.

In a letter of welcome to the participants in the meeting, Cardinal Martini, Archbishop of Milan, wrote among other things the following words which sum up very well the sense of the meeting:

"I hope that the Young Adult European Meeting in Milan will be a great occasion of prayer, and that the city can be transformed in a way into a great city of prayer, where we will be able to experience the beauty and joy of silence, of contemplation, of listening to the Word of God, of praise, of petition, of intercession.

The Church of Milan, while letting itself be penetrated by the Gospel spirit of Taizé, would like to share with the young people who are meeting together the joy and the effort of rediscovering the Church of the Apostles and of living from it and making it concrete today; of showing how, even in a big city in a secularised society, the Gospel can be lived out by a part of the population and become the fulness of life for everyone; of preserving and transmitting in a new

way a particular heritage of prayer and liturgy; of animating society from within and giving it life. In particular, we would like to share with so many other churches of Europe and with all the young people present at Milan our great tradition of attention to children and to young people and their daily life as well as to their search for vocation, an attention which is actualised above all in the structure of the 'oratories' and of all the pastoral work with young people."

WHAT ARE YOU HOPING FOR FROM THE MEETING IN MILAN?

"I come from Silesia, and I live in Stuttgart. I certainly want to go to Milan, and I have already signed up for an Italian language course! What I like is to meet people who are open and welcoming and to feel a strong sense of communion with young people from every country. For me the prayers are important, but so are the times of reflection on the Bible in the morning and afternoon. You can listen and learn a lot from the others, because deep down we are all asking ourselves the same questions. During the last European Meeting, I appreciated being given a responsibility and discovering, for example, that I could do a translation with a microphone. I found confidence in myself, and that helps me to be more open. Now we also have a regular prayer in our town. In the common prayer, I was really surprised that there were very few words and readings. So every word counts, and you can think about them better. With all the different languages, I found that my vision of the Church changed: before the Church was just the building in my village, and perhaps a place of pilgrimage. Now, I see the communion of the Church wherever Christians from every country come together in the same spirit."

We are all Human Beings

When we read the news from Russia, it can be difficult to see what hope there is there, or to understand, behind the statistics, how people are actually living. The letter which follows, written by Olga, a young woman who is a doctor in Moscow, can help to understand the daily life and the search of many ordinary Russians today.

In Moscow, nothing has changed: we are in a hurry all day. The conversations that I am going to tell you about are from our stay at Taizé this summer. They all have a very Russian character, linking the tragic, the absurdity of life, and the hidden strands of goodness – in fact, all that we are and all that makes up our life, even today. We are going through troubled times again.... In the buses and trains, people's faces are grim. The tram has become a political club: people talk about prices and about money (it has lost two thirds of its value); they argue about the government, they criticise the president, they make predictions – will the famine return or not? –, they share their worries about rumours of civil war. Nevertheless, it is still good to be able to talk about things freely....

The voices of our conversations at Taizé in the summer are still with me. We did not know then what we would find on our return home.... We had met Ivan and Nina from Nijni Taguil the year before. It had been their first visit to Taizé. This summer they brought with them their daughter and some friends from their town: Emilie, an epidemiologist, Tamara, the manager of a preserved food factory, and Anna, the head nurse in a psychiatric hospital. Ivan is a metal-worker. How are they managing now over there beyond the Urals? Here are some echoes of our meetings:

Tamara: I love life. I like everything. I liked life in the past, and I like life today. Russia is so beautiful.

Olga: You have a lot of responsibility in your work and you need to be careful. So how do you keep on trusting?

Tamara: For me, it's simpler than it seems. I work in a team who I trust completely; and they trust me. We have an ordinary kind of relationship. It isn't a big factory. I know all the employees personally, workers and foremen. For me the position in the hierarchy isn't very important. I treat everyone in the same way as I treat myself and as I hope people will treat me. That's why my relations with my employees are ordinary.

Taizé has been the most important event in my life. I have never experienced such a deep and broad unity as we experience here with the young people when we sing together during the prayer. I come into the church, I close my eyes, and I listen. The emotion is so strong that I find myself in

tears. It is so beautiful. It's the strongest feeling since... the strongest ever. Still, I love my life at home, in my own country.

Olga: How can you carry on with this experience of Taizé back at home?

Tamara: I am going to talk about it at work. And I will come back again. I would like to invite my grandson: it's so important to see with your own eyes. Here you can learn.

Olga: Learn what?

Tamara: Unity. That such a unity is possible. The openness in everything. I don't believe that the big problems we have today are insuperable obstacles. It is just that we are getting started again, moving forward, growing. We are so far behind compared with all the other countries. We used to be completely cut off.

I don't have any great power. But I know that I can really move things when I work with others. To organize something in the business, I talk about it and if they agree then actually I've managed to change something.

Emilie: I don't know much about religion. Of course, for the big feasts I go to church and light a candle. I haven't read the Bible, except for a few texts for children. But as for believing, I believe in God, and I believe in the final victory of justice and goodness. I believe that in any case evil will be overcome.

Difficulties? For us, in Russia, our whole life consists of difficulties and trials. But God will judge. Get justice from our leaders? In the past we could still appeal to the Party; now even that isn't possible any more. It seems to me that everyone has to face their difficulties alone. That's the reason God has sent us: to overcome these trials. But of course people help each other. That was what really struck me when I went to Armenia to help after the earthquake in 1988. People had come from all the republics, as they then were. And everyone was trying, in their own way, to comfort, to bring joy to those who were in this misfortune. Everyone prepared their best local specialities: the Ukrainians prepared borsch, the Balts brought cold meats, the Georgians brought their sauces....

(Alena is the daughter of Ivan and Nina, from Nijni Taguil; she lives at Irkutsk in Siberia. Last winter an aeroplane crashed onto a residential area. Alena tells how the people who wanted to help were so

numerous that they had to queue as they brought everything that was needed or waited to give blood.)

Alena: They arrived even under the first shock without fully understanding what was happening. The whole town lived in this desire to help. People reveal themselves in difficult moments. They are not as bad as we sometimes think. After this disaster many people adopted children from the orphanages. Help came from other regions as well and even from abroad. And children were adopted by families from elsewhere, too.

Svetlana: At Nijni Taguil, people have to join a waiting list for seven years before they can adopt a child. Still, life is hard in our area. Pollution is a big problem. The big industries have their factories in the city. Whether with the metallurgy, the railway construction factory, the chemical factories, and the cement works, 90% of our children suffer from allergies.

Anna: At the psychiatric hospital our work is complicated. Our patients are difficult. You get morally worn out. During the holidays, even if you don't go anywhere, you don't manage to relax. Everyone is suffering the consequences of the malfunctions of society. I am in charge of four hundred and twenty staff who have not received any salary for six months. Everyone would like to quit their job. But then who would look after the patients? So I need to look after not only the patients, but the staff as well. So you get so worn out that you lose all your kindness, and at home you don't want to talk to anyone, you don't want any conversation. And you don't manage to sleep. You are always tense, you withdraw into yourself. It wasn't an easy journey to get here to Taizé. In the bus I didn't speak to anyone. I said that I had been tired for a whole year. I didn't want to discuss anything. All this was still boiling inside me. I held myself back as much as I could....

Here, only four days have gone by. I go to the prayers, and I don't understand half the words of the songs, but it does me good. I fly, as if I had

A Prayer for Advent

For those preparing to participate in the European Meeting in Milan, or for those who would like to celebrate an evening of prayer before Christmas in small groups or in families.



SONG

PSALM

O Lord, you once favored your land and revived the fortunes of Jacob, you forgave the guilt of your people and covered all their sins. Will you not restore again our life that your people may rejoice in you? Let us see, O Lord, your mercy and give us your saving help. I will hear what the Lord has to say a voice that speaks of peace, peace for his people and friends and those who turn to God in their hearts. Salvation is near for the God-fearing, and Glory will dwell in our land. Mercy and faithfulness have met; justice and peace have embraced. Faithfulness shall spring from the earth and justice look down from heaven. The Lord will make us prosper and our earth shall yield its fruit. Justice shall march in the forefront and peace shall follow the way.

(from Psalm 85)

READING

Paul wrote: Rejoice in the Lord always;

again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(*Philippians 4,4-7*)

SONG

SILENCE

PRAYER OF PRAISE

- God our Father, we bless you for having called us to know you, to love you and to live with you.
 - Song: "Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini" (once)
- You sent your beloved Son, your perfect image and the reflection of your face; he became like us in all things but sin.
 - Song: "Benedictus qui venit..." (once)
- In him you proclaimed the good news of your kingdom; you forgive our offenses and heal our wounds.

- Song: "Benedictus qui venit..." (once)
- Keep us in the communion of your Son; keep us alert as we wait for the day of his coming.
 - Song: "Benedictus qui venit..." (once)
- Give us your peace, so that we can communicate it to one another in mutual love, and serve the human family.
 - Song: "Benedictus qui venit..." (once)

OUR FATHER

PRAYER

Christ Jesus, you were a human being; and you know how humans aspire to inner peace. Our soul asks you: give us peace within. And in our darkness, you kindle the fire of your forgiveness and your compassion, a fire which never dies away.

or

Jesus our peace, where the trusting of faith has been shaken you make us bearers of your Gospel, and you keep us close to those who are paralyzed by doubt.

SONGS

Many people find it hard to understand petitionary prayer, whether we are asking on our own behalf or for others. Are we informing God about something which he does not know, which is clearly absurd, or are we trying to convince him to act in our favour? But if he needs convincing, what do we mean by saying that he loves us?

In the teaching of Jesus, neither of these two motives is the reason for petitionary prayer. He himself says straightforwardly: "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him." (Mt 6.8), and again: "If you, with all your faults, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Mt 7.11) Yet on several occasions, Jesus encourages us to ask, with the trust of a child.

Prayer is not a lack of trust in God's care for us and in his will to act in our favour. Quite the contrary. Because God is our "Abba" and, in Christ, we are all his beloved sons and daughters, we can and we ought to ask him for everything. This is how our trust, as his children, is expressed. The loving relationship between him and us takes form in the daily realities of our existence.

It is clear that God could manage without our collaboration. He could treat us as passive beings who do nothing but receive, like a mother with a newborn baby. But his love for us is deep, so that he wants to make us into partners who can collaborate actively in the realization of his plans. Petitionary prayer is a chance given by God to express our reciprocal relationship with him, to share his concern for the whole human family.

Might we be afraid that our requests are too self-centred? In the fourth chapter of Saint John's Gospel, Jesus meets a woman from Samaria and talks to her about the "living water" that he can give

Two Questions about Prayer

her. The moment comes when she replies: "Lord, give me this water, so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." (Jn 4.15) Her prayer is still very much for herself; she is only thinking of her own convenience. Nevertheless she has taken a big step forward: she has discovered her own thirst and expressed it to Christ. It does not matter that she still has a very superficial idea of this thirst: if she continues to express it to God, the thirst will grow deeper. She will discover depths in it that she had not imagined, which only the living water can quench. Her request has brought the desire that is in her into her relationship with Christ. Her inner life and the world as God sees it begin to enter into a slow reconciliation. By taking the risk of opening herself to Christ as she really is, this woman will allow him in the end to touch others through her.

In the Bible, our highest activity is to "repay the Lord for all the good he has done for us" (cf. Ps 116.12), or in Biblical terms to "bless God". "Blessed be God ... who has blessed us with every blessing..." (Eph 1.3). The end of the Gospel according to Luke offers an eloquent picture of this exchange: Christ enters the glory of the Father and blesses his friends, who remain in the temple blessing God (see Lk. 24.51-53). From now on a current of praise unites heaven and earth.

But how can we manage this? Is it possible to praise God as well as having a realistic view of the world we live in, where not everything seems like the work of a good creator? Can we bless the Lord in the midst of wars, of family tragedies, the suffering of children, of the innocent?

It is clear that evil in all its forms is the biggest obstacle to praise. Nevertheless, it is exactly at this point that we touch on what is most characteristic of the Bible and, even more, of the Gospel. The experience of evil leads our human nature to withdraw into itself: we try to defend ourselves or else to launch a counter-attack. And our fundamental dynamism, our response to a call which guides us towards something beyond ourselves, gets broken. But when in the middle of their trials human beings turn towards the Source of their life in an attitude of trust and "hope against all hope" (cf. Rm 4.18), something is released, and the evil which attacks us becomes swallowed up in a greater Life. "I cry 'Praised be the Lord' and I am saved from my enemies." (Ps 18.3)

But to keep the spirit of praise in a situation which is opposed to it, we need discernment. We need to understand that God is not the origin of this situation nor an accomplice to it, but that he is on the side of life and that he wants to help us get free from the "cords of death." Only then can praise spring up in its fulness. Such praise is the fruit of a renewed encounter with the Lord who is making himself present in a completely new way.

This was the experience of Job, the figure of every person who is tested beyond their strength, who will cry out at the end of a long period of struggle with God: "I used to know you only by hearsay, but now I have seen you with my own eyes" (Job 42.5). This was the experience of the three young men thrown by a tyrant into a burning furnace, who "walked in the midst of the flame, praising and blessing God ... and the angel of the Lord breathed upon them in the middle of the furnace like the freshness of the breeze and the dew, so that the fire did not touch them at all and caused them no anguish or pain" (Dn. 3.24, 50/Song of the Three Young Men 1 & 26-27).

And this was above all the experience of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. His words "Not what I will, but what you will" are a cry of praise. They spring from the confidence that, despite appearances, God is his beloved "Abba" who never abandons him and who is preparing a fulness beyond hope in the midst of the present darkness. Our praise is, in the last analysis, a participation in this attitude of the Son who carries the love of the Father right into the darkness of death, in order to make a world that is closed in on itself burst open from the inside and enter into the current of life.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

JANUARY

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

JOHANNINE HOURS

LUKE 17:11-19

1 Fri The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him and then returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

Lk 2:16-21

2 Sat You came near when I called you, Lord, and you said, "Do not be afraid."

Lm 3:54-57

3 SUN John writes: The light shines in the darkness, and darkness could not overpower it.

Jn 1:1-18

4 Mon You are merciful to all, Lord, because you are almighty. You overlook people's sins so that they can repent. Yes, you love everything that exists.

Ws 11:21-26

5 Tue God is faithful, he will give you strength and protect you from the evil one.

2 Th 3:1-5

6 Wed EPIPHANY When they saw the star, the wise men were filled with a great joy. As they entered, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshipped him.

Mt 2:1-12

7 Thu Joyfully you will draw water from the springs of salvation, and you will say, "Praise God and call on his name. Proclaim God's deeds to the nations!"

Is 12:2-6

8 Fri You, Lord, are our Father and Redeemer. You act in favour of those who trust in you and welcome those who accomplish justice joyfully.

Is 63:16b-64:3-7

9 Sat As it is written in the book of Isaiah, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight"; John the Baptist was in the desert announcing a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Mk 1:1-8

10 SUN When Jesus had been baptised, he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice came from heaven: This is my Son, the Beloved, my favour rests on him.

Mt 3:13-17

11 Mon Sing a new song to the Lord! Praise his name! Proclaim God's salvation, day by day. Tell the nations of his glory!

Ps 96

12 Tue The Lord sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted and to proclaim freedom to those in captivity.

Is 61:1-3

13 Wed Peter said: God sent his word, and announced the good news of peace through Jesus Christ; he is the Lord of all.

Ac 10:34-43

14 Thu You are part of God's household. You are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone.

Ep 2:19-22

15 Fri God says: Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, my faithful love for you will not be shaken.

Is 54:10

16 Sat St Paul writes: The Spirit seeks life and peace.

Rm 8:5-11

17 SUN John the Baptist saw Jesus coming towards him and said: There is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Jn 1:29-34

18 Mon Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice! The Lord is near.

Ph 4:4-7

19 Tue The Lord says to his people: I have carried you since you were conceived. Until your old age I shall be the same, I shall sustain and save you.

Is 46:3-5,9

20 Wed Paul writes: Through our faith in Christ Jesus, we can approach God with complete confidence.

Ep 3:7-12

21 Thu Isaiah said: I thought my struggle had been futile, that I had worn myself out for nothing. Yet all the while my cause was with the Lord and my reward with my God.

Is 49:1-6

22 Fri The servant of God says: The Lord is coming to my help. Who then can condemn me?

Is 50:7-9

23 Sat Jesus noticed a tax collector called Matthew sitting at the tax office and he said to him, "Follow me." And, leaving everything, Matthew got up and followed him.

Lk 5:27-32

24 SUN Jesus said: Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.

Mt 4:12-17

25 Mon Jesus sent out his disciples, saying: Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation.

Mk 16:15-20

26 Tue Thus says the Lord: Does a woman forget her child at the breast, or fail to cherish her offspring? Even if she forgets, I will never forget you.

Is 49:13-15

27 Wed In God we live and move and have our being.

Ac 17:22-28

28 Thu Jesus said to his disciples: Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom.

Lk 12:22-32

29 Fri You have become light in the Lord. Live as children of the light.

Ep 5:8-14

30 Sat Very early, long before dawn, Jesus got up and went to a deserted place and there he prayed. When the disciples found him, he said to them, "Let us go to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also."

Mk 1:29-39

31 SUN Jesus' disciples came to him and he taught them saying: Happy are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Mt 5:1-12

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Ten men approach Jesus expectantly. They wish to be healed of their "leprosy" (a term which, at that time, was used to describe a wide variety of skin diseases). They "keep their distance" as they were supposed to do, so as not to transmit any possible contagion to others. Jesus has compassion on them and heals them by his word.

The passage, however, does not end there, for one of the ten returns to thank Jesus. We can nearly picture him as he runs and sings. He "praises God with a loud voice" and upon reaching Jesus, falls prostrate at his feet and offers him his thanks. Jesus has him get up, and then says to him, "Your faith has healed (or saved) you."

Why did Jesus not say these words to the other nine as well? Did not the others also show faith, and were not they too healed of their ailment? The ten together had expressed their confidence in Jesus by requesting his help, and they all could see how they had been healed. The nine who did not return, we might say, stop halfway whereas the Samaritan follows his desire to the very end. The Samaritan allows himself to be carried along by a force hidden within his desire. Deep within, he wishes to sing for God and to love life. And it is in thankfulness that he finds what he is looking for.

A further detail could have us pause and reflect. The one who welcomes fully God's gift is from Samaria. As a "foreigner" he would have heard that he had few, if any, rights. And yet he is far from being a bitter or callous person. He is able to rejoice in the free gift God offers him.

- What do we desire of Christ? How can we welcome the gifts of God?
- What might "turning back" to give thanks mean for me?
- What sustains my own joy in living, and my desire to love life?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

FEBRUARY

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

JOHANNINE HOURS

1 KINGS 17:8-16

1 **Mon** God says: I have put water in the desert for my people to drink. The people I have formed for myself will sing my praises.
 Is 43:18-21

2 **Tue** PRESENTATION OF THE LORD When he saw the child Jesus, Simeon praised God, saying: My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples — a light to enlighten the nations.
 Lk 2:22-32

3 **Wed** Pray in the Spirit at all times. Never tire of praying for all God's people.
 Ep 6:18-20

4 **Thu** God says: My home is a high and holy place, but I am with the humble and contrite to revive their spirit.
 Is 57:14-15

5 **Fri** Stand firm, let nothing shake you, be full of energy for the work of God, knowing that in the Lord nothing of your labour is wasted.
 1 Co 15:54-58

6 **Sat** God says to his people: No longer will violence be heard of in your land. The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, your God will be your glory.
 Is 60:18-20

7 **SUN** Jesus said to his disciples: You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden.
 Mt 5:13-16

8 **Mon** The days are coming, says the Lord, when I shall send hunger upon the land; not hunger for food or thirst for water, but a hunger to hear the Word of God.
 Am 8:11

9 **Tue** As the earth sends up its shoots and a garden lets its seeds sprout, so God will cause justice and praise to spring up.
 Is 61:10-11

10 **Wed** Let no one seek their own interest, but rather the good of others. Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
 1 Co 10:23-31

11 **Thu** God will guide his people in joy, with the mercy and saving justice that come from him.
 Ba 5:1-9

12 **Fri** We proclaim Christ crucified, which to the nations is foolishness, but to those whom God has called it is Christ, the strength and the wisdom of God.
 1 Co 1:22-25

13 **Sat** The Lord says: See, I am going to create new heavens and a new earth. Be filled with rejoicing for ever, for I am creating my people to be gladness.
 Is 65:17-18

14 **SUN** Jesus said: If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with them first, and then come back and present your offering.
 Mt 5:17-37

15 **Mon** The Lord says: I am going to send peace to my people like a river. When you see this, your heart will rejoice.
 Is 66:12-14

16 **Tue** You are eagerly waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will continue to give you strength to the very end.
 1 Co 1:4-9

17 **Wed** ASH WEDNESDAY Jesus said: When you give, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your generosity is secret. And your Father, who sees all that is done in secret, will reward you.
 Mt 6:1-4

18 **Thu** I think of all your deeds, Lord, and stretch out my hands to you; my soul is thirsting for you like a parched land.
 Ps 143

19 **Fri** Paul writes: I did not come among you with eloquence or wise arguments to announce the mystery of God. I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ crucified, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.
 1 Co 2:1-5

20 **Sat** Paul writes: All things are yours; but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.
 1 Co 3:18-23

21 **SUN** Jesus said to the tempter: It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."
 Mt 4:1-11

22 **Mon** Peter said to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by any human, but by my Father in heaven."
 Mt 16:13-20

23 **Tue** Jesus said: Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant will also be.
 Jn 12:20-33

24 **Wed** I cry out to you, Lord, set me free from prison that I may praise your name.
 Ps 142

25 **Thu** St. Paul writes: Though there seemed to be no hope, Abraham hoped and believed, being fully convinced that God is able to do what he has promised.
 Rm 4:18-25

26 **Fri** We now put all our heart into following you, God, and seeking your face. Rescue us in accordance with your wonderful deeds.
 Dn 3:41-43

27 **Sat** The Lord says: Come back to me with all your heart. Come back to the Lord your God who is tender and compassionate, and rich in faithful love.
 Jl 2:12-13

28 **SUN** At the transfiguration of Jesus, the disciples fell face down to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."
 Mt 17:1-9

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

During a period of severe drought, Elijah hears God's call to set out. He withdraws initially to a solitary place located near a stream, far from any settlement. Turning northward, he heads then to a foreign land by the name of Sidon (which corresponds roughly to present-day Lebanon). The experience of the ancient Israelites who had lived in Egypt and then crossed the desert becomes, in a sense, his own.

Once in Sidon, he comes to the town of Zarephath. As any tired traveller might do, he calls out to a passer-by and asks for some water to drink. Upon seeing that she seems well-disposed to his request, he asks then also for a piece of bread. But this simple question turns out to be too much for her to bear. She pours out her despair: she is a widow, living alone and poor, without even enough to feed her child. With the wood she is collecting she intends to bake a last meal with the tiny quantity of flour which remains, after which she expects they will die.

At that point, Elijah asks her for more than a little water and bread. He asks her to trust in God. God will provide what is necessary to live, no matter if she is a foreigner and does not know the God of Israel. The God to which Elijah is a witness looks after all those who hope in him. She manifests her confidence by offering her guest the little that she possesses.

"Hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God" (Hosea 12:6). Without knowing it, the widow of Zarephath puts into practice these words which express in a very simple manner the covenant which God has made with his people. Through her gestures and her welcome, she does what she must do as a human being. Her trust in God, shown in the face of an empty future, preserves her from discouragement.

- What touches me in the attitude of the widow of Zarephath?
- What aspects of our own future may make us worry?
- In what even modest ways can we share and welcome others with what we have and so not remain passive?

ings. And I want to speak to people. I smile. At first, I didn't understand why strangers smiled. What were they so happy about? I found it strange. I thought: I can't see anything so joyful, I'm not interested. But now I want to smile too.

Nina: Where we live, some people grow hardened and give up hope; others start digging their vegetable gardens. Not accusing anyone, but trying to escape. If a trial comes upon us, we've got to go through it. There's no other way.

Anna: When I think of the people where we live who have been suffering inside themselves for more than seventy years and about the present situation which is exacerbating their illness, I'd like to bring them a bit of the warmth from here. In our difficult situation, I've had to argue endlessly with our staff, trying to convince them like a preacher, nagging at them day after day: "But what are you going to do about the patients? Are we going to abandon them, throw them out after working here for so many years?" They have understood me, and at this time of crisis, no-one has left their work at the hospital.

Olga: How much do they earn?

Anna: Kopeks.... A nursing auxiliary at our hospital earns the equivalent of £30, a nurse earns £60 [now only a third of this — editor's note]. And these salaries haven't been paid for six months. It's lucky some of them have a vegetable garden. For those who don't, there are still their parents, who can lend them something from their miserable pension....

Olga: As an anonymous nun wrote just before the revolution: "Human beings live only because together we keep on weaving the secret strands of goodness."

Anna: I work a lot with people. And I am going to try and transmit this provision of energy that I have received at Taizé. I am going to do my best to tell them.

Olga: What they need is their salary, not words.

Anna: They need words too. They need to be supported. If you don't go towards them, if you don't talk to them, then violence is going to break out pretty soon. You need to go towards them, to talk to them. We are all human beings, we are all harnessed to the same yoke....



Echoes from the Continents

Argentina

Sharing the life of the very poor

Matias lives in Buenos Aires, where he is a student of engineering. He has spent several months at Taizé. He talks about his commitment at home:

"Since the age of fifteen, I've spent a large part of my holidays with a group which prepares throughout the year to go and pray in the small, poor villages of our country. In Argentina, more than half the population lives in Buenos Aires. The rest of the country is often deserted and very poor. The mission of our group is orientated towards meeting and sharing with the inhabitants of the village.

During the weeks spent with the poor, the life of our group of fifty or so young people is very simple: we sleep on the bare ground in the little village school and we live a life of prayer and service among the villagers. The days begin with a common prayer and sharing on Bible texts, and we talk together about our experiences of the day before. Then we go into the streets of the village to meet the people; during the day they are mostly women with their children. Some of the houses where we are invited reveal the extreme misery of the inhabitants: all the members of the family live in a few square metres. In the afternoon we organize games for the children and times of sharing with the young people, and we discuss and pray with them.

In these villages, we often find ourselves confronted with an immense distress, and the only help we can give is to listen. Everyone likes to talk, but sometimes we're not so used to listening. One day, I met a woman who was beaten by her husband, and who had to undertake the tasks of family life all alone; the only thing I could offer to support her was to listen. These times spent listening to people, who are often very poor, give me much more than I am able to give them.

In life, there are often two ways before us: one is offered by society and it seems to be the easy way; the other is the one which leads towards Christ, towards a life of simplicity and sharing. We are often tempted to take the first. But it is the second which enables us really to discover the message of the Gospel. For me, the time spent with these people does not demand an enormous effort. I have so many beautiful experiences that I would miss them if I didn't have them. A lot of my friends go on long journeys in

the mountains or spend all their holidays on the beach. As for me, I could not imagine spending my holidays anywhere else than with the group of young people in the villages. I know that our presence, once a year, is very important for many of the people there.

Our group gets ready for this all through the year through regular meetings where we pray or share about Bible texts.

I am also a member of a team that organizes a big meeting every year at Easter, which brings together about eight hundred young people for times of prayer and sharing. This meeting is held at San Isidro and is for young people of the diocese between 16 and 18 years old. It begins on the Wednesday of Holy Week and finishes after the Easter Sunday mass, and it gives a chance for young people to pray and to share their life and their faith through the different activities that are held. Some people are invited to share with everyone their experience of life and faith with the poor, the sick, and the marginalised. The Bishop of the diocese joins the meeting every year to meet the young people and to answer their questions."

Bolivia

Visiting Prisoners

During the summer meetings at Taizé, the young people coming from far away have often shared events from their own lives in small or large groups. This is what Roberto, from Bolivia, said one afternoon about his experience of visiting prisons in his country:

"The first time someone talked to me about prison, the idea of a dirty and horrible place came to mind. For a lot of people prison is synonymous with problems, and that's why many of them do not visit their friends who are in prison: they are afraid of being found mixed up in the affairs of their former friends. What is most surprising is that, while some prisoners are very unhappy to be in captivity, others use it as a source of gain, because they can get involved in all sorts of trafficking, often with the connivance of the guards. Another major problem is that many prisoners are rejected by the other inmates because of their crimes."

The prisoners' visiting scheme was set up five years ago, and I have visited the most dangerous detention centres of the country myself. For several years, I have been doing this every Sunday. At first, I always asked the inmates the cause of their imprisonment. If it was theft, I didn't have any problem talking to them. If it was a felony or a rape, I kept my distance and refused to speak to them. And every time I left the prison, I checked that I still had my wallet with me and that I hadn't had anything planted on me.

But as I went along, my regular presence inside the prison enabled me to build very strong links with the prisoners and to be open to what they wanted to confide. Then I understood that trust is really essential to be able to get to know others and for them to be able to accept us too. When we are together, songs have become very important, though at the beginning the prisoners couldn't stand them. But since then, links have been forged, and now, with some of the prisoners, I have a real friendship which grows through listening and understanding. I can even assure you that I have experienced more beautiful friendships in prison than outside!

Outside the prison, my friends asked me why I didn't spend more time with them, why I didn't take more time to discuss things with them. And I answered them: "If you want to spend more time with me, come with me to the prison,

and we can talk together there. You don't need me, you can live without me, but the prisoners need me to be there every Sunday, they need me to listen to them." For a lot of people the time I spend in the prison is wasted. But for me, it is essential. Because of these visits to prison, I have started studying law.

In all this process, faith has played a very important role. I often talk about God, about the way he welcomes everyone, and how he can help everyone to change their life. The witness of the man who leads our group, who is himself a former prisoner for murder and drug-trafficking, has very much impressed me.

The first time that I was really frightened in prison was when a prisoner came to me and put his hand on my shoulder to say hello. His name was Julio. He was 21 years old, and was thought of as the most dangerous inmate of the prison. He told me his whole life story, and explained that he had killed several people. During this time, I followed every one of his movements, watching his hands attentively, to be ready to react at the least sign of violence on his part. Then I realised that God loved everyone, even him, and that he had always protected me in difficult situations, and that he was not going to abandon me at that moment. Then Julio asked me not to leave him, but to keep coming to see him. 'The only one who can change my life,' he said, 'is the one you have been talking about: God.'

At one time in my life, I used to work with children too. I was very happy to be with them. And so I was tempted to stay with them all the time. But I discovered that the children had God in their hearts already. The prisoners, on the other hand, needed help to discover him. That's why I keep on with this work with the prisoners, and specially with those who are thought of as the most dangerous."

Chile

Continental Meeting for Young

For many years now young people from Latin America have been participating in the meetings at Taizé. Often they stay for three months. As they help welcome other young people, lead different meetings, and participate every Saturday at the "Forum" their presence brings us a great deal.

Thanks to this long relationship with young people from Latin America, once again it was a great joy for three brothers of the Community to join with them in the Continental Meeting for Young Latin Americans which took place from 6 — 11 October 1998 in the city of Santiago. Present at the meeting were 400,000 young people from all countries of the American continent, from Alaska to Argentina, gathered together in the capital of Chile to pray and to prepare to welcome the new millennium.

As in the European Meetings, young people from different countries and also from different regions of Chile were welcomed by families in Santiago and in the four neighboring dioceses. The welcome offered was warm and generous. For many young people it was the welcome which touched them the most. For example, in "La Lengua", a poor neighbourhood which is known for its violence right in the centre of Santiago, the families prepared to welcome 400 young people. The families repaired and painted their houses, bought mattresses, and asked members of the family to move out in order to welcome the young pilgrims who were coming for the meeting. It was very moving to see how these poor families opened their doors to welcome and to offer the little they possessed.

The first four days the young pilgrims met in the parishes. There was a theme for each day. The first day's theme was announcing the Good News. In front of the churches, in the open air, the young people asked different groups of the parish to announce some good news, something like people working with the poor, an event or an activity that touches the life of the neighborhood and that brings hope. Young people wanted to begin the meeting with good news, thus showing that life is not made up only of problems but that even if difficulties arise, especially in situations where great poverty exists as in many Latin American countries, the Gospel calls us to hope and not to despair.

Another day's theme was Solidarity. Young pilgrims visited old people, the sick, prisoners. They planted trees and constructed houses. All this was to show how a future is made possible for all when we live in solidarity with another, when we become aware that we are not alone. To live concretely this day of Solidarity the young pilgrims have gathered together a contribution for the people of Haiti, the poorest country in Latin America.

The theme of another day was Reconciliation: all the parishes of the city celebrated a feast of forgiveness. This was followed by a day of God's Kingdom. The young pilgrims reflected upon the parables of the Kingdom and how they are called to participate in constructing the Kingdom of God here on earth.

The meeting culminated in a vigil and a Eucharist. Something very moving during these big celebrations was to see how these young pilgrims passed from a spirit of festival to a meditative spirit of prayer. The first part of the vigil was a feast, a spontaneous joy brought out through the traditional dances of people from Latin America. With the same breath these young pilgrims entered into a meditative prayer with moments of silence, readings from the Bible and songs from Taizé.

The great hope that we can receive from the young people of Latin America, even with enormous problems that they have to face in daily life, is a joy of living, a joy of being. This joy is expressed by the sense of festivity that is so present in the Latin American culture, as well as by the choice for hope that they make by taking on responsibilities for those who undergo great suffering.

During this week of the meeting, three brothers of Taizé organised prayers in the churches of San Francisco and San Raphael right in the centre of Santiago. It was an immense joy to meet many who have been to Taizé and also to be with others coming from both North and South America.

Taizé: A Meaning to Life

Olivier Clément.

Professor at the Orthodox Theological Institute of Saint Sergius, Paris, the author links his own personal search for meaning in life to the experience of the thousands of young adults who participate in the meetings in Taizé.

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